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SUBJECT: SURVEY SHOWS DRAMATIC DECLINE IN PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR MUGABE AND ZANU-PF

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) According to a survey conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) in May 2009, if an election for president was held in Zimbabwe today, support for ZANU-PF would be at an all-time low -- just over 10 percent -- while the MDC would enjoy 57 percent support. Large majorities in both urban and rural areas said they supported the inclusive government, and an even larger majority (78 percent) indicated that they trusted Tsvangirai somewhat or a lot. By comparison, only 35 percent indicated that they trusted Mugabe. On job performance, approximately 82 percent approved of Tsvangirai's efforts in office, while only a quarter approved of Mugabe's job performance. Two-thirds of respondents supported lifting sanctions. On the economy, responses indicated greater optimism about Zimbabwe's economic future and the quality of life for Zimbabweans. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Researchers from the Harare-based MPOI presented findings of a May 2009 nationwide public opinion survey, entitled "The Quality of Democracy and Governance in Zimbabwe," to a group of like-minded donor nations on September 22. The survey examined attitudes regarding voting intentions, performance of the inclusive government, international sanctions, and current economic conditions. It was conducted from May 9 to May 23, 2009 in Zimbabwe as part of the Afro-Barometer Round 4 process. (NOTE: Afro-Barometer (<http://www.afrobarometer.org>) is a public opinion research project covering 20 countries, which receives funding from USAID, among other donors. The Senior Advisor to the project is Michael Bratton, Professor of Political Science at Michigan State University. END NOTE.)

¶3. (SBU) The survey results are expected to be made public on September 29. Until release, they should be kept close hold.

The Survey Methodology

¶4. (SBU) The MOI survey involved a nation-wide random sample of 1,200 adult Zimbabweans aged 18 and above who were chosen using a "Probability Proportionate to Population Size" (PPPS) methodology. The researchers used the 2008 Zimbabwe population projected figures from the 2002 census figures. 150 enumeration areas (EA) were randomly sampled and eight interviews were conducted in each EA.

ZANU-PF and Mugabe Support Eroded,
Even in "Strongholds"

¶5. (SBU) Respondents were asked for which party they would vote if presidential elections were held tomorrow. While 25 percent refused to respond, 57 percent said they would vote for MDC-T and only 10 percent said they would vote for ZANU-PF. Four percent didn't know, four percent said they would not participate, and other parties, including MDC-M, PF-ZAPU, and Kusile Mavambo Dawn, received less than one percent nationally. (COMMENT: It is reasonable to assume 0 percent nationally. (COMMENT: It is reasonable to assume that, given past electoral violence targeted against MDC supporters, most of the non-respondents would support the MDC-T. END COMMENT.)

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¶6. (SBU) When disaggregated by urban versus rural location or by age, support for the MDC-T remained steady between 56 and 59 percent, with the exception of voters over 51 years of age (48 percent). ZANU-PF commanded only 13 percent support from rural voters, 4 percent from urban voters, and 14 percent from voters over the age of 50. ZANU-PF's highest levels of support were in Mashonaland Central (20 percent) and Matabeleland South (17 percent). (COMMENT: These results belie the continued belief by some analysts and academics that ZANU-PF still enjoys considerable support in rural areas and in particular within the three Mashonaland provinces. END COMMENT.)

¶7. (SBU) When asked if they trusted the President and the Prime Minister, 37 percent responded that they trusted Mugabe "somewhat" or "a lot" versus 78 percent for Tsvangirai. The gulf in opinion regarding the President and the Prime Minister was even greater when respondents were asked how well each was doing his job; 81 percent approved or strongly approved of Tsvangirai's performance while only 23 percent approved of Mugabe's efforts. (COMMENT: Surprisingly, Mugabe's levels of trust and approval were both substantially higher than ZANU-PF's projected 10 percent support from voters, suggesting Zimbabweans have somewhat more residual affection for Mugabe than they do for his party. END COMMENT.)

Public Supports GNU, But Not Sanctions

¶8. (SBU) Public support for the inclusive government was high with two-thirds of all respondents and equal numbers in both urban and rural areas saying it was the "best option to resolve the political crisis." A majority of respondents from every province -- ranging from 53 to 74 percent -- supported the inclusive government. The three Mashonaland provinces, where much of last year's election violence occurred, recorded the highest percentage of support for the new government, ranging from 71 to 74 percent.

¶9. (SBU) When asked to choose whether sanctions were hurting ordinary Zimbabweans and should be removed, or whether

sanctions only targeted a few individuals resistant to change and should be maintained, over two-thirds called for the removal of sanctions. Slightly less than a quarter said they should remain. Despite their agreement with negative official rhetoric on sanctions, most Zimbabweans were aware of U.S. assistance. When asked how much the U.S. does to help Zimbabwe, 57 percent said somewhat or a lot. Similar numbers of Zimbabweans credit SADC and the UN with helping; South Africa (77 percent) and donors and NGOs other than the UN (80 percent) get more credit than the U.S., while China (45 percent) and the UK (37 percent) get less.

¶10. (SBU) MPOI researchers noted a significant increase in what they term the "political patience" of the population. Qwhat they term the "political patience" of the population. For instance, when asked whether the government should be given more time to deal with inherited problems, two-thirds of respondents agreed (compared to only 30 percent in 2005 and 52 percent in 2004). Another indicator of political patience was that four years ago, 65 percent of those interviewed said that "if the present system cannot produce results, another system should be tried." This year, only 30 percent agreed with that statement. (COMMENT: The increase in "political patience" would appear to be a result of support for the new government. END COMMENT.)

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Respondents More Positive on Economy

¶11. (SBU) Public attitudes on the economy were less negative than one might have expected, with roughly equal numbers of respondents saying macro-economic conditions were "bad" or "very bad" (43 percent) compared to those who described conditions as "good" or "very good." The percentage of people describing conditions as bad in May 2009 was much lower than those registered in 1999 and 2005, during both of which years 94 percent of respondents described macro-economic conditions negatively. Curiously, responses in 2009 are only slightly more favorable about the economy than they were in 2004, when 49 percent were negative.

¶12. (SBU) In describing their own situations, respondents were again more optimistic than one might have expected with slightly more people describing their personal economic conditions as "good" or "very good" (38 percent), than those describing them as "bad" or "very bad" (36 percent). Once again, the percentage of people saying personal conditions were "bad or "very bad" was markedly lower than in earlier years (in 2004 and 2005, 54 and 88 percent of those interviewed, respectively, called conditions bad or very bad). (COMMENT: Given that only 12 percent of survey respondents said they worked full time for a cash income while just 10 percent earned cash for part-time work, people's relative optimism is remarkable and probably a result of faith in the new government. END COMMENT.)

Evidence of Alienation

¶13. (SBU) Optimism about the new government did not overcome negative perceptions of fairness and rule of law in Zimbabwe. When asked whether government officials who commit crimes go unpunished, only 19 percent said rarely or never while seventy percent said often or always. When the same question was asked about ordinary people, 60 percent responded that ordinary people who break the law rarely or never go unpunished. Asked how much they personally fear becoming a victim of political violence or intimidation during an election campaign, sixty-eight percent said a lot and only 9 percent said not at all. Asked how many government officials are involved in corruption, 36 percent said most or all, 45 percent said some, and only 5 percent said none. Elected

officials received a similar rating, police were considered even more corrupt, while traditional leaders and judges/magistrates were considered less corrupt.

COMMENT

¶14. (SBU) The lack of support for Mugabe and ZANU-PF in former areas of staunch support, such as Mashonaland, is startling. The wave of violence unleashed in Mashonaland and other provinces in 2008 following the elections, combined with an economy that steadily declined during this decade, which many believe was the result of ZANU-PF mismanagement (which many believe was the result of ZANU-PF mismanagement and corruption, has cost Mugabe and his party dearly. If a reasonably "free and fair" election were held today, Mugabe and ZANU-PF would be swept from power.

¶15. (SBU) In stark contrast, Tsvangirai enjoyed a high degree of public support in May. We suspect that remains true today as Tsvangirai appears to be getting credit for an increase in political space and marginal economic

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improvements. It is noteworthy that he has drawn large crowds at rallies throughout the country. But people are looking for continued improvements in availability of food, education, health, and infrastructure; if improvements do not take place, his popularity and that of the MDC could wane. A new poll will be conducted in October 2009. END COMMENT.

PETTERSON